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Colleagues Laud Achievements of W. Alton Jones Foundation

Michael Lerner, President
Jenifer Altman Foundation

The world as we know it changed on September 11. So soon after the event, it is far too early for us to be able to discern the lineaments of the months and years that lie before us. We grieve what we have lost. We are apprehensive about what lies ahead.

One thing is certain. The great underlying issue that concerns us as biodiversity funders, namely the progressive destruction of the web of all life, has not changed at all. It is clear that we should be steadfast in our purpose to preserve the web of life. How our work will need to be recast to achieve all that we can in the new world that we face remains a question shrouded in the fog and clamor of incipient war.

There is another event, infinitely smaller in scope, which took place only shortly before the world changed. That event, however minute in comparison with the world-changing events of September 11, will also affect our field for a long time. I refer to the decision, announced by the Trustees of the W. Alton Jones Foundation (WAJF), to dissolve the Foundation and to create three new charitable entities in its place.

Over the past 11 years, under the leadership of Pete Myers, the WAJF established a reputation for excellence in philanthropy in the fields of biodiversity conservation and nuclear nonproliferation second to none in the US. For many of us who work in the closely allied fields of biodiversity and ecological health, the loss that the dissolution of the Foundation represents is profound.

As of October 31, when the staff of WAJF completed its work, a foundation that contained a whole community of our most valued colleagues was no more. The loss of financial, intellectual and moral capital is incalculable.

There is no doubt that the extraordinary staff people who made WAJF what it was will seed the nonprofit and foundation communities with their energies and their talents. We can also hold the hope that the WAJF successor organizations may make significant contributions. But neither the ongoing work of the gifted people who staffed WAJF nor the hope that the WAJF successor organiza-

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tions will do important work can, in all honesty, make up for the loss we are facing with the demise of the Foundation.

Organized philanthropy, as we all know, is a very curious vocation. It is not truly a profession with professional training and standards. It has no "bottom line" as the world of commerce does. The dysfunctionality factor in the allocation and distribution of resources is often disturbingly high.

So it is actually a rare thing when the demise of a foundation, or more commonly the shift of resources out of a former field of major interest to a foundation, excites the extent of concern among colleagues in the funder community and grantees that the closing of WAJF has elicited. From across the country and from around the world, scientists, statesmen, grassroots activists, policy advocates, and an extraordinary array of other concerned world citizens have been voicing their deep sadness at this news.

What was remarkable about WAJF was neither the size of its assets, though this was important, nor its fields of general concern, though these were wisely chosen, but above all the exceptional skill with which resources committed to the great issues of our time were allocated and deployed. What colleagues and grantees witnessed at WAJF was exceptionally strategic and effective philanthropy.

At the heart of the Foundation for the past eleven years was its Director, Pete Myers. Pete is a naturalist, a scientist, a consummate strategic thinker, and a philanthropist of a very high order. I know very few people in philanthropy who work as hard as Pete does. I know virtually no one who travels more to see things first hand in every corner of the globe, and who learns more from what he sees.

I have no doubt that Pete, along with all the gifted staff members he assembled, will go on to further critical work on the issues to which he has given his professional life. But at this moment, I simply want to thank Pete and the entire staff of the Foundation for all they have contributed. I would also like to thank the Trustees of the Foundation who guided and stood behind this remarkable community of vision and effort for eleven years.

In my personal judgment, as a student of philanthropy, the work of the W. Alton Jones Foundation in biodiversity and ecological health philanthropy, and nuclear nonproliferation philanthropy, is philanthropy for the history books. As we grieve its passing, let us honor it, and give thanks for it. In the uncertain years that lie ahead, we will miss very much this extraordinary community of common purpose in our midst.

Maureen Smyth, Vice President-Programs
Lois DeBacker, Environment Program Director
C. S. Mott Foundation

Vision. Leadership. Passion. Commitment. Talent. Courage. Optimism.

Those were the words that came to mind when we sat down in early October to reflect on the work of the W. Alton Jones Foundation. Under Pete Myers' leadership and with the work of an outstanding team of staff, the Foundation was a pioneer in many ways – in the issues it chose to tackle, the techniques it chose to support, and its willingness to collaborate with other grantmakers.

While we admire the full range of issues the Foundation chose to support, we most respect its leadership in increasing public awareness about the dangers of endocrine disrupting chemicals. Pete's personal commitment to this issue was extraordinary. We remember how hard he drove

himself during the book tour for *Our Stolen Future*. We worried for his health but saw that he felt a calling to make a difference on the issue.

We admire, too, the innovation that the foundation so often fostered. W. Alton Jones was an early adopter of new information and communication technologies and, through its Circuit Rider program and grantmaking, gave a very important boost to its grantees' use of technology.

The Foundation was among the first to invest significantly in strengthening the media and message savvy of the environmental community. It never shied away from funding critically important policy advocacy. It maintained a commitment to funding grassroots organizations in the US at the same time it did important grantmaking internationally.

The staff of the W. Alton Jones Foundation wanted to make a difference. That is what drove them in their work, and it is one of the reasons they were so supportive of collaboration among grantmakers. We appreciate how willing they were to help educate and, in turn, learn from colleagues through participation in the CGBD, Environmental Grantmakers Association, and other funder groups.

We are greatly saddened by the dissolution of the W. Alton Jones Foundation. None of us work harder than its staff did. None of us care more about the environment than they do. We wish each and every one of the Foundation's staff good fortune as they explore the next chapters in their careers.

Beto Bedolfe, Executive Director
Homeland Foundation

My connection to Pete Myers goes way back ... back to before I even knew him. From 1977 to 1980, I was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay. During that time I played music with Liza Myers, who was teaching at the American School in Asuncion, met Roger, one of Pete's brothers, and got to know Pete's folks quite well. They all lived in Asuncion and Mr. and Mrs. Myers' home was open to PCVs; we had some very nice afternoons enjoying their hospitality.

Imagine, then, my surprise when I met Pete twelve years later at a CGBD meeting at the Island Press office in Washington, D.C. After we put it all together, we could only shake our heads and say "what a small world."

In the past nine years Pete has been a good friend, but he has been an amazing colleague as well. He introduced me (along with many CGBDers) to the whole issue of endocrine disruption and convinced me that this was a threat of great importance. When Homeland Foundation decided to make environmental health a major component of our work, Pete gave his time generously to help us think it through. Clearly, it was rough duty when he agreed to come to Laguna Beach to speak with our board, but he survived and our program really picked up steam.

I think that foundations interested in protecting biodiversity will find it tough sledding in the near future without W. Alton Jones working with us. Pete is not the only one who will be missed. Karen Peabody O'Brien and Charly Moore have added energy and intellect to issues that we all hold dear; I mean they provided real juice when it came to saving nature. Kathy Cornelius, working from the Jones office, brought sunshine to numerous discussions. Certainly they will all be missed but, thankfully, only for a moment. I am looking forward to more good times, and productive times, with them all.

Jeanne Sedgwick, Conservation Program Director
David & Lucile Packard Foundation

Like all of their colleagues, I was stunned and saddened to hear the news about the dissolution of the W. Alton Jones Foundation. Pete Myers and his staff have been thoughtful, creative, and highly professional additions to the coterie of environmental grantmakers. The Packard Foundation's energy work in China, our ancient forest efforts in British Columbia, all of our attempts to get more sophisticated in the use of strategic communications—just to mention a few examples—have been influenced and improved by WAJF's leadership.

Speaking personally, the essence of that which I will miss most about having the WAJFers in our midst, is that quality which I find to be most rare, and most personified in Pete - the ability to transform knowledge into inspiration, and inspiration into action.

Pete is a rare life form: the scientist who is a persuasive orator; the professional tactician whose intensity of belief and commitment is conveyed in his every move. It's a rare conversation with Pete that doesn't have some element of a conversion experience. Commitment, passion, knowledge, stunning powers of articulation: he has always moved and inspired those around him, and will continue to do so, whatever venue he chooses.

Pete is one of the reasons I so deeply revere the concept of the "scientist-advocate," and why we at the Packard Foundation have been building so many efforts to engage science and scientists in efforts to slow the unraveling of the natural world. Plus, he's really, really great company. We'd miss him, but there's no way we'll let him get away!

"Whoa! Move over, Thoreau."

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Marine Conservation

While continuing to share information on fisheries management, aquaculture, marine protected areas and a number of other issues, members have expressed an interest in convening some more in-depth strategy discussions to better understand how the myriad issues fit together into a coordinated conservation strategy. CGBD staff will be collecting and disseminating information from Working Group members regarding their individual funding strategies in advance of a meeting of the entire membership, probably in February.

Forest Conservation

The *Sustainable Forestry* sub-group will host a funder briefing on "Sustainable Forests and Sustainable Communities" on December 4-5 at the Renaissance Charlotte Suites Hotel in Charlotte, North Carolina. The briefing will provide funders with an overview of key issues in biodiversity conservation in the Southeast and discuss the role of sustainable forestry in preserving the region's biodiversity and rural communities. The briefing will begin at 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday, December 4 and conclude at approximately 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 5. Field trip opportunities will be available on the afternoon of December 5.

The *Public Forest* sub-group continues to monitor early developments in federal land and resource management in the new Bush Administration. Sub-group members continue to participate in conference calls of the Collaborative Defense Campaign (CDC). Issues at the forefront of CDC concern include: development of the Bush Administration energy policy, including potential development of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and anti-environmental riders on appropriations bills. In addition, sub-group members continue to convene frequent conference calls to discuss legal and administrative actions regarding the US Forest Service's roadless areas policy.

Biodiversity and Environmental Health

Over the past two years, CGBD members have expressed growing enthusiasm for the idea of ecological health, which views human, animal and ecosystem health as interdependent rather than as distinct disciplines or areas of funder interest. In April, CGBD sponsored a highly successful Funders Briefing on Ecological Health in Washington, D.C., with over 70 foundation representatives attending. A distinguished roster of speakers illustrated the interdependence of the health of people, other species and the habitats in which they live.

In order to build upon the momentum the field of ecological health, the CGBD has introduced a quarterly publication (for funders ***only***) on the subject: Nature is Health Newsletter. This column will offer an ecological health perspective on issues of central interest to our members. Nature is Health Newsletter will be distributed via list serve in October, January, April, and July. Funder ideas for future topics are welcome.

MEMBER NEWS

The *C. S. Mott Foundation* is pleased to announce that Sam Passmore will be joining its staff as a program officer effective November 1. Sam will work with Lois DeBacker and Rebecca Fedewa on the Foundation's grantmaking to advance conservation of freshwater ecosystems in the bi-national Great Lakes basin and portions of the southeastern US. Sam has worked for the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League for the past nine years, and his prior work experience includes service with other environmental nonprofit organizations. He received his bachelor of arts degree from Oberlin College and a masters in public affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University.

The newest member of the CGBD is the *Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation*. In November of 2000, Gordon and Betty Moore celebrated the creation of a unique private family foundation dedicated to improving the quality of life for generations to come. In keeping with the Moores' philanthropic interests, the Foundation supports four major program areas: higher education, scientific research, the environment, and select San Francisco Bay Area projects. The Foundation strives to fund projects that will further its mission - projects chosen through careful research that promise significant and measurable results.

With the innovative use of technology and intellectual capacity, the Foundation is addressing the challenges facing the health of the planet. By coupling this approach with the judicious selection of projects, a long-term focus, the collaborative administration of grants, and a keen eye for potential outcomes, the Foundation will benefit causes of abiding concern to Gordon and Betty.

The Environment Team at the Foundation, headed by Mick Seidl, is in the midst of developing its strategy given the Moores' dedication to biodiversity conservation. The Foundation is currently investigating program focuses of large wilderness areas, stewardship, salmon and marine ecosystems, climate change and energy, and collaboration within the NGO community. The Foundation has both a permanent staff and a cadre of "virtual" senior staff who will be looking at these areas of interest. Additionally, the Foundation's Research Team, headed by Dan Martin - former CGBD Board President - will be a critical player in the Foundation's strategy formulation.

Key staff include:

John M. "Mick" Seidl
Program Chief, Environment

Dan Martin
Program Chief, Research

Adrian Forsyth
Director of Biodiversity Science

Enrique Ortiz
Senior Program Officer, Environment

Pic Walker
Program Associate, Environment

Marcia Macedo
Program Associate, Environment

UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov. 5-8. The Wildland-Urban Interface: Sustaining Forests in Changing Landscapes (Gainesville, FL). Contact: Dianne Powers, (352) 392-5930 or dwpowers@mail.ifas.ufl.edu.

Nov. 6-7. The Practice of Restoring Native Ecosystems Nation Conference (Nebraska City, NE). Contact: www.arborday.org/RNEconference.

Nov. 12-13. Science and Stewardship: Creating Greener Communities (Washington, DC). Contact: Wildlife Habitat Council, (301) 588-8994 or www.wildlifehc.org.

Nov. 14-17. International Wildlife Rehabilitation Conference (Lake Buena Vista, FL). Contact: IWRC, (707) 864-1761 or iwrc@inreach.com.

Nov. 26-28. Southern Forest Science Conference (Atlanta, GA). Contact: Ruth McWilliams, (202) 205-1373 or www.southernforestscience.net.

Dec. 2-4. Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems Funders Annual Meeting (New York, NY). Contact: Betsy Lydon, blydon@rffund.org.

Dec. 17-21. International Conference of Pesticide Exposure & Health, National Institutes of Health (Bethesda, MD). Contact: SOEH, 703-556-9222 or soeh@degnon.org.

Jan. 27-30, 2002. Aquaculture America 2002 (San Diego, CA). Contact: (760) 432-4270 or worldaqua@aol.com.

Feb. 24-27, 2002. Watershed 2002 (Ft. Lauderdale, FL). Contact: Water Education Federation, (800) 666-0206 or confinfo@wef.org.

Feb. 27 – Mar. 1, 2002. Grantmakers in Health (GIH) Annual Meeting (New York, NY). Contact: GIH, (202) 452-8331 or http://www.gih.org.

Mar. 30, 2002. International Wildlife Law Conference – The Convention on Biological Diversity: A Ten Year Report (Washington, DC). Contact: http://eelink.net/~asilwildlife.

Apr. 3-7, 2002. North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference (Dallas, TX). Contact: Richard McCabe, (202) 371-1808.

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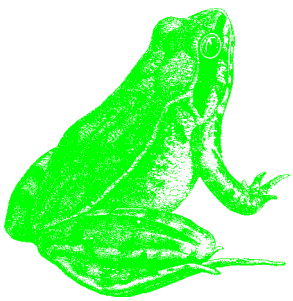
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

Presidio Building 1016
P.O. Box 29361
San Francisco, CA 94129-0361

Phone: 415/561-6575
Fax: 415/561-6490
E-mail: cgbd@cgbd.org
Web: www.cgbd.org

Lynn Lohr, Executive Director

William Hull, Program Officer

Alicia Ushijima, Program Associate

THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY
Presidio Building 1016
P.O. Box 29361
San Francisco, CA 94129-0361